

VZCZCXRO1058
OO RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHBK #5731/01 3120643

ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 080643Z NOV 07
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0561
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RUEHG/USMISSION GENEVA IMMEDIATE 1897
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 5232
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5121
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 7913
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1483
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 3869
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1954
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4840
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON 0144
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0008
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0787
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 0940
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0899
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 0918
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 4371
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RHEHN/NSC WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHFJSCC/COMMARFORPAC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 005731

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NSC FOR PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/07/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [TH](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: LOCAL NGOS TELL A/S SILVERBERG THEY SUPPORT USG
POLICY ON BURMA

BANGKOK 00005731 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Five prominent organizations working on Burma-related issues in Thailand expressed their support for USG policy on Burma and offered ideas for next steps during a November 5 meeting with I/O Assistant Secretary Silverberg and the Ambassador. Overall, the group felt that targeted sanctions against junta members and their cohorts were an effective tool to pressure the GOB. They confirmed reports of Burmese opposition leaders and monks fleeing to Thailand, although they emphasized that the issue of Burmese seeking refugee status here was an ongoing matter that desperately needed increased support. Finally, they presented their views on the possible roles ASEAN and the UN could play in realizing national reconciliation in Burma. END SUMMARY.

SANCTIONS KEY TO PRESSURING GOB

¶2. (C) In a small gathering at the Ambassador's residence on November 5, the Ambassador and I/O Assistant Secretary Silverberg, in Bangkok to address the situation in Burma, met with a cross section of NGOs based in Thailand and working on Burma. The group included Charm Tong from the Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN), Aung Zaw from the news journal Irrawaddy, Sann Aung from the National Coalition Government

of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), Jack Dunford from the Thai Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), and Sunai Phasuk from Human Rights Watch.

¶13. (C) There was a consensus among the assembled group that U.S. sanctions were an effective mechanism to get at the Burmese junta. The U.S.'s recent announcement of targeted sanctions in particular resonated throughout the Burmese leadership and their supporters, our contacts agreed. Aung Zaw stated that despite attempts to appear unmoved by the new sanctions, the junta's business partners are feeling pressure. He claimed notorious Than Shwe insider Tay Za was to convene a meeting in Bangkok with his associates to address the problems created for their companies by the most recent round of U.S. sanctions.

¶14. (C) Sann Aung championed increased U.S. sanctions on Burma, and proposed that we coordinate our efforts with the EU and Australia, who have also announced sanctions in recent weeks. Aung Zaw agreed that sanctions would be even more effective if those countries imposing them had a united voice. In response to Silverberg's asking how best to target expanded sanctions, Sann Aung suggested we examine the business dealings of the state-owned Myanmar Oil and Energy Enterprise and Myanmar Gem Enterprise. He added that the U.S. needed to prevent these businesses and their executives from being able to conduct financial transactions, both official and personal. Charm Tong interjected that, in addition to Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia also sheltered assets of the GOB and Burmese elites, although she provided no further details.

¶15. (C) Aung Zaw scoffed at recent announcements by the French and Burmese Foreign Ministers, which called for economic

BANGKOK 00005731 002.2 OF 003

incentives for the junta. Zaw recalled a famous quote from a former Burmese Foreign Minister that epitomized why Aung Zaw believed the GOB did not care about incentives: "Do not give us bananas, we are not monkeys."

BURMESE REFUGEES IN THAILAND ONGOING PROBLEM

¶16. (C) Charm Tong related that in recent weeks numerous monks had entered Thailand from Shan State. These monks were native to the Shan State, and many had been caught up in the 1996 massive relocation of the Shan population. Subsequently, they had traveled to Rangoon and Mandalay to further their education, only to return to the Shan State after the September protests in those cities. Charm Tong reported that the GOB regularly checked monasteries in Shan State to determine which monks had returned as instructed and which had failed to show up. This form of intimidation had caused many monks to flee to Thailand, stated Charm Tong, where they had tried to blend in with the migrant worker population. She expected monks to continue coming out of Burma for the foreseeable future.

¶17. (C) Aung Zaw recounted how, following the 1988 protests in Burma, more than 10,000 refugees, including himself, had fled to Thailand. He stated that there were not as many people fleeing the recent crackdown. This was because it was more difficult to get out of Burma now, due to the increased number of armed checkpoints and decreased presence of Karen National Union (KNU) strongholds along the border, which had been safe havens for fleeing activists in 1988. Dunford emphasized that many people who came to Thailand after the 1988 crackdown did not come to seek refugee status, but rather to regroup with the intention of returning to Burma to continue their fight.

¶18. (C) While he recognized the importance of assistance to recently arrived political activists from Burma, Sunai highlighted the fact that the refugee issue was not new in

Thailand. This was an ongoing problem that included thousands of Burmese, particularly from the country's ethnic minorities, entering Thailand as humanitarian and economic refugees. Dunford agreed, and emphasized that what the Burmese military did to protesters in Rangoon in September has long been routine practice in the border regions. The military acted with impunity he stated. Dunford noted that refugee support organizations such as TBBC faced a financial crisis at the moment. As international attention focused on events inside Burma, many governments had explored how to increase their economic support to Burmese opposition and humanitarian groups. While Dunford appreciated such considerations, he warned that the refugee organizations operating on the border were in desperate need of increased funding as well.

ROLE OF UN AND ASEAN

¶9. (C) In response to the group's conclusion that the U.S. needed to coordinate its actions with other countries, Silverberg asked under what umbrella we would come together. Aung Zaw cited the UN as a good place to start. Silverberg expressed concern that while visits from various UN

BANGKOK 00005731 003.2 OF 003

representatives were positive overall, it appeared the junta used the promise of future visits to extract concessions from Gambari. Sunai agreed, and stated that the junta put on a show whenever Gambari visited Burma. He added that if the UN Secretary General had a personal representative permanently

SIPDIS
based in Rangoon, the international community, through the auspices of the UN, could focus on a much broader spectrum of issues.

¶10. (C) Several participants also voiced the need for ASEAN to take a more prominent role in pushing the junta to undertake meaningful reform. The Ambassador mentioned that ASEAN made a strong statement in New York in September, but he wondered what the group thought about the progress within the ASEAN framework. Sunai stated that ASEAN needed to be prodded to be more than a talk shop. Since departing from New York, most ASEAN officials had returned to business as usual with Burma. If at the November ASEAN Summit the leaders were to say nothing more than that Burma's behavior is unacceptable, Sunai continued, they would have essentially not done anything new since their New York statements. Adding that it was difficult to mobilize ASEAN as a whole, Sunai recommended the U.S. focus on bilateral relations with key countries such as Indonesia and Vietnam.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) A/S Silverberg's interlocutors represent some of the best informed and most credible figures from the NGO community in Thailand who focus on Burma. They seemed sincere in welcoming our sanctions, but we noted an overall tone of pessimism on their part. They seemed particularly skeptical that ASEAN would mobilize effectively to support real change in Burma in the near term. End Comment.

¶12. (U) A/S Silverberg did not have the opportunity to clear this cable.

BOYCE